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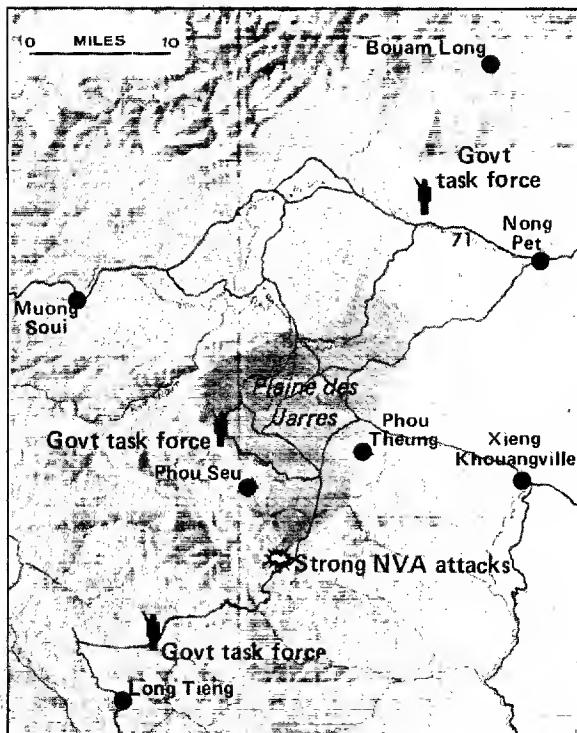
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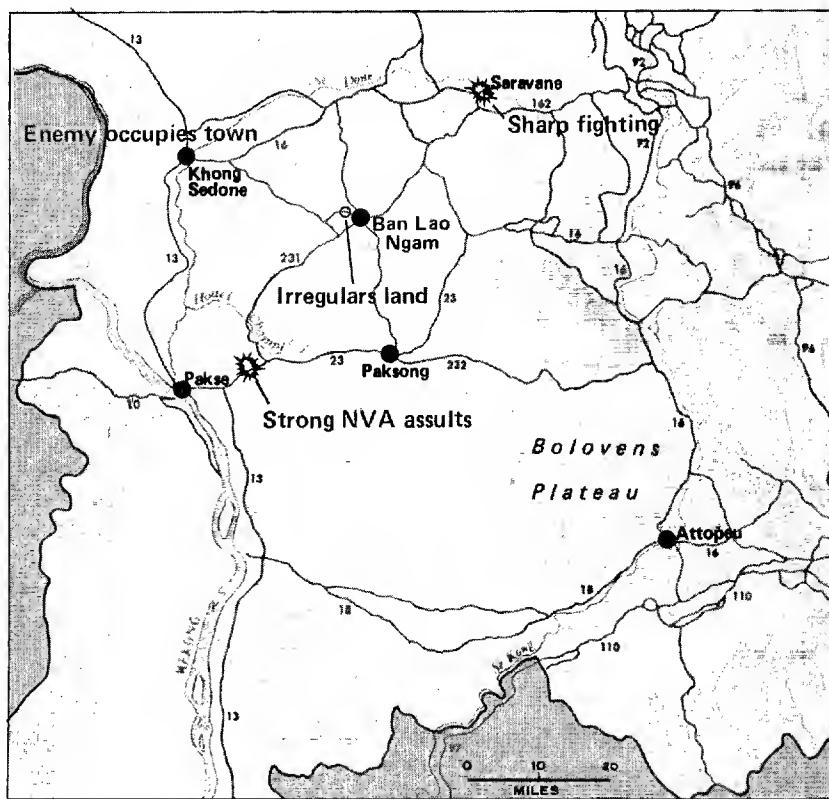


LAOS

Area of maps

● Government-held location
 ● Communist-held location

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LAOS: Government forces are meeting strong Communist resistance to their efforts to regain important ground in both the north and south.

Vang Pao's task force on the southern tip of the Plaine des Jarres was hit by strong North Vietnamese ground attacks supported by tanks and artillery on 26 October. Initial reports indicate that at least one irregular unit has abandoned its positions.

The beginning of peace talks in Vientiane lends additional urgency to the government's efforts to regain a presence on the Plaine. If the irregulars are repelled, Vang Pao will have little time left to organize another major push onto the Plaine before improving weather enables the Communists to reinforce and resupply. Some new Communist troops may already be in the pipeline.

In the south, eight irregular battalions continue to meet stiff resistance from North Vietnamese units entrenched in the town of Saravane. Farther south, four other irregular battalions recently airlifted behind enemy lines to the vicinity of Ban Lao Ngam, a village on an important enemy supply route, have yet to encounter opposition.

The Communists are maintaining pressure on government troops elsewhere in the south. Elements of the North Vietnamese 39th Regiment have thwarted efforts to reoccupy Khong Sedone, which was abandoned by Lao Army forces late last week. Troops from the North Vietnamese 9th Regiment have launched several sharp attacks on government positions near the intersection of Routes 23 and 231. The presence of government troops at Ban Lao Ngam, however, may force the Communists to shift some of their units to that area, thereby easing the pressure in the Khong Sedone or Route 23/231 sectors.

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EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES: The EC is apparently under pressure from France to establish a common policy that could in effect restrict soybeans, the major US agricultural export to the community.

Motivated by its desire to develop commercial soybean production in France, Paris has requested that the EC Commission prepare a regulation establishing domestic support measures and import controls similar to those now in effect for certain other oilseeds.

US exports of soybeans and soybean products to the Common Market ran about \$786 million in fiscal year 1972. These exports are duty free, as provided by a GATT agreement, and the proposed EC regulation would technically respect that agreement. The administrative controls suggested in the draft regulation, however, would increase the costs of imports and thus have a restrictive effect on trade.

The draft proposal will be submitted to the entire EC Commission during the first half of November. Strong resistance to including soybeans in the common agricultural policy can probably be expected not only from influential importer interests in the community but also from numerous officials throughout the EC who would wish to avoid any new measures that would draw strong objections from Washington.

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DAHOMEY: Dissident army officers yesterday overthrew the civilian three-man Presidential Council currently headed by President Justin Ahomadegbe.

The coup was apparently well-planned and accomplished quickly. President Ahomadegbe and cabinet members were captured in the presidential palace where they were meeting when some 70 to 100 soldiers attacked. Almost simultaneously the radio station was taken and prearranged statements were broadcast condemning the civilian government and announcing that a revolutionary, military government had been formed.

The only military figure definitely linked with the coup so far is Major Mathieu Kerekou, deputy chief of staff and veteran of a 1967 military coup, who made the radio announcements. Kerekou, identified as a potential troublemaker, was recently linked with Colonel Alphonse Alley, an inveterate coup plotter who now is secretary-general of National Defense. Press reports from Paris assert that Alley, chief of state for a brief period following the 1967 coup, is now in charge.

The coup, Dahomey's sixth by the military in nine years, has not caused much reaction among the general population. The French, whose aid helps keep Dahomey afloat, are undoubtedly disappointed, however. They had hoped for a continuation of the relative stability achieved under the presidential council for the last two and a half years. After the 1967 coup France temporarily suspended all budgetary assistance. Paris may reconsider President Pompidou's visit to Dahomey scheduled for late November. [redacted]

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TUNISIA: President Bourguiba is facing renewed activity from several dissident elements.

Prominent members of the liberal faction of the ruling Destourian Socialist Party have sent a letter to Bourguiba stating their belief that the political situation has deteriorated as a result of the president's refusal to implement reforms adopted by the party congress last October. The letter proposes general measures to correct the situation and requests a reply by early November. The party congress resolutions supported liberal demands for more democracy and a lessening of Bourguiba's strong personal control.

The liberals also intend to press Bourguiba for reform in the National Assembly, which opened on 24 October. The liberals demonstrated their strength in the assembly on opening day by forcing the first secret ballot in its history. Much of the liberals' effort may now be directed toward securing further action on a proposed constitutional amendment providing for direct election of a presidential successor. Bourguiba has insisted on maintaining the current procedure providing for the prime minister's assumption of the office.

Meanwhile, students continue to be restive. The reopening of the science school at the University of Tunis on 19 October was reportedly the scene of student demonstrations that required police intervention. The main source of student dissatisfaction is party control of their organization.

Bourguiba is also facing renewed calls for the release of Ahmed Ben Salah, the discredited former economic chief convicted of treason in 1970 after his ambitious agricultural reforms were repudiated by Bourguiba. A petition for his release

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for health reasons has reportedly received wide backing in university and professional circles. A more politically oriented petition has been circulated by loyal supporters of Ben Salah.

Prolonged political strife could worsen Bourguiba's already poor health which in the past has caused him to be incapacitated for extended periods. Bourguiba may decide to make some accommodation to the demands of the liberals as a result of their demonstration of strength in the assembly.

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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

The United States Intelligence Board on 26 October 1972 approved the following national intelligence estimate:

NIE 12-72 "The USSR and the Changing Scene in Europe"

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